

Scientific and Statistical Committee's
Coastal Pelagic Species Subcommittee
Report on Revisions to the Terms of Reference for the CPS Assessments
and Acceptable Practices for CPS Assessments

Pacific Fishery Management Council
Online meeting
April 17, 2024

A. Background

The Scientific and Statistical Committee's (SSC) Coastal Pelagic Species (CPS) Subcommittee (CPSSC) met via webinar on April 17, 2024, to discuss proposed changes to the Terms of Reference (TOR) for CPS Stock Assessments, as well as to the Accepted Practices Guidelines for CPS Stock Assessments in 2025. Members of the CPS Management Team (CPSMT), CPS Advisory Subpanel (CPSAS), past Stock Assessment Review (STAR) Panels and Stock Assessment Teams (STATs), and representatives of the Southwest Fisheries Science Center (SWFSC) Division responsible for CPS assessments were present.

B. CPS Stock Assessment Terms of Reference

Major Changes

The draft CPS TOR for 2025-2026 was adapted from the previous 2023-2024 TOR for CPS assessments. Relatively few major changes were made for this assessment cycle when updating the 2023-2024 CPS TOR. The CPSSC flagged the following changes to the TOR as the most significant for this cycle:

- 1) STAR Panel Chair duties were expanded to ensure compliance with the forthcoming code of conduct (which still needs to be developed by the Council and SSC) and soliciting questions and comments from the CPSMT and CPSAS representatives during STAR Panel discussions.
- 2) Assessment documents are required to include bridging analyses documenting the effects of changes from the previous assessment.
- 3) STATs producing update assessments are allowed to exclude data sources / data points that were used previously, as long as sufficient justification is provided.

Unresolved Issues

The CPSSC identified several issues that could not be fully addressed during the subcommittee meeting before the TOR is finalized including:

- 1) The Council and SSC need to develop a code of conduct. Once that code of conduct is developed, it should be inserted in Section 5.
- 2) Further clarity is needed on expectations regarding deadlines and communication needs between STATs, state and Tribal agencies, and the CPSMT regarding data (particularly catch time-series) to be used in assessments. The expectations are similar to, but not necessarily identical to, those identified for groundfish due to the different entities involved and little to no need for multi-year harvest projections for CPS assessments. Annie Yau (SWFSC) will discuss this issue further with data providers and CPSMT representatives and provide some proposed language.

- 3) It was not clear whether STATs or the CPSMT should be responsible for Catch Reports. Annie Yau (SWFSC) will discuss this issue further with CPSMT representatives and provide some proposed language.
- 4) Although this is an issue that extends beyond the TOR itself, meeting participants noted some lack of clarity in the notation describing the application of the x_3 term in the anchovy flowchart figure from Council Operating Procedure (COP) 9, which is reproduced in the TOR. It was further noted that this step in the flowchart is of limited relevance at present, because the ACL is set well below the ABC and so attainment of a large fraction of the ABC is not expected. This may not be the case during periods of low abundance. So, clarifying the figure in the COP may be warranted, and any updates to that figure should also be included in the TOR.

Other Items Discussed

The CPSSC spent most of its remaining time on the following issues (items indicated by an asterisk should be incorporated in the groundfish TOR).

- 1) *An added STAR Panel responsibility: “if technical disagreement(s) with the STAT arise, resolve them in a respectful manner.”
- 2) *Language around disagreements between STAR Panels and STATs, which was revised to be more objective (e.g., by eliminating references to “opinion” and “honest”) and to clarify the need to document the rationales on either side of disagreements, not just that disagreements occurred.
- 3) Minor further revisions to the language around recusals of SSC members who serve on STATs or STAR Panels.
- 4) Whether there should be a specific amount of time the STAT should have to review the draft STAR Panel Report – the CPSSC decided this could be highly dependent on assessment-specific circumstances and so left the language on this topic vague.
- 5) That the STAR Panel Report is due two weeks after the STAR Panel meeting or by the Briefing Book deadline for the Council meeting at which the assessment will be reviewed, or whichever is earlier. The groundfish TOR does not have a similar requirement for “whichever is earlier,” and that may not be the preferred approach for groundfish.
- 6) The text acknowledging the possibility that a STAR Panel might be held to review an assessment that was not a full assessment, which provides flexibility in case a need arises in the future. However, this was not intended to create the expectation that this will apply for CPS assessments, and no scenarios where this would be necessary for CPS have emerged to date.
- 7) That the final assessment document is due three months after the assessment is adopted, not at the end of the calendar year (the latter being more appropriate timing for groundfish).
- 8) That Council staff rather than NMFS is the lead entity for the entire stock assessment prioritization process, which differs from the process for groundfish where NMFS takes a leading role in the early stages.

C. Accepted Practices Guidelines for CPS Stock Assessments

The draft Accepted Practices Guidelines were developed based upon the previous version. Minor changes, including adding sentences or editing text for clarification, were made throughout the Accepted Practices Guidelines. Larger changes include (by section):

Data Considerations

- *Allocation of catch and survey biomass between the southern and northern subpopulations of Pacific sardine*: Three sentences were added describing how the northern subpopulation (NSP) versus the southern subpopulation (SSP) stock habitats are defined and used for stock delineation.
- *Removals data*: Language was added detailing the parties responsible for updating catch series and requiring that States provide catch data by the deadline (8 weeks prior to the STAR panel).
- *Compositional data*: The text was corrected to indicate that weighting should be based on catch numbers when combining compositional data.
- *Constructing Indices of Abundance*: Language was added indicating for which stocks the acoustic trawl survey can be used for estimating biomass.

Modeling

- *Age- or Sex-specific M (natural mortality)*: Language was added clarifying how to use the M -prior when using the Lorenzen age-specific M approach.
- *Weight-At-Age*: Language was added describing the Cheng et al. (2023) approach.
- *Diagnostics*: Language was added detailing the accepted approach for implementing the likelihood profile on terminal year biomass.

Applying Harvest Control Rules

- *Future Removals*: Language was added indicating the ability to use rates rather than amounts when determining future removals.
- *Determining the Value of Sigma*: Language was added detailing the approach developed in Wetzel and Hamel (2023) for determining and applying the rate of change in sigma with the age of the assessment.

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